

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 1298

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CZ, PFOR

SUBJECT: HUSAK AS PRESIDENT

GENEVA FOR AMBASSADOR SHERER

SUMMARY: IN BECOMMING PRESIDENT WHILE REMAINING GENERAL SECRETARY, GUSTAV HUSAK HAS SHOWN EVERYONE THAT HE IS STILL NUMBER ONE. NEVERTHELESS THERE IS A GENERAL RELUCTANCE AMONG OUTSIDE OBSERVERS IN PRAGUE TO ACKOWLEDGE HUSAK'S ASCENDANCY AS SOLID. WHILE WE DOUBT THAT ANY DEAL WAS REACHED FOR HUSAK TO LOSE HIS PARTY CHIEFTAINSHIP AT THE NEXT PARTY CONGRESS--APOPULAR SUPPOSITION AMONG DIPLOMATA HERE--WE DO FEEL THAT HIS
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ASSUMPTION OF BOTH JOBS INCREASES HUSAK'S VULNERABILITY,

SO THAT THE COMING MONTHS MAY BE A SPECIAL TIME FOR TRIAL FOR HIM. WHAT HAPPENES BETWEEN NOW AND FEBRUARY IN THE SOVITE POLITBURO; WHAT HAPPENS IN HUSAK'S ANTI-DUBCEK CAMPAING, LEFT TO SIMMER SINCE EARLY MAY; HOW HUSAK COPE WITH THE PRESSING PROBLEMS BEFORE THE COUNTY, INCLUDING THE CZECH-SLOVAK DICHOTOMY WHICH HIS VERY PRESIDENCY ACCENTUATES--THESE AND OTHER THINGS WILL PROBABLY AFFECT HUSAK'S LONGEVITY IN HIS PRESENT DUAL ROLE. IN THE MEANWHILE WE BELIEVE IT IS WISE TO REGARD HUSAK AS CLEARLY PRIMUS INTER PARES, AND NOT TO EXPECT HIM TO SLIP UNTIL HE SHOWS SIGNS OF SLIPPING. WE SEE NO REASON TO EXPECT ANY MEANINGFUL POLICY CHANGES, ALTHOUGH SOME CZECHOSLOVAKS ARE CERTAINLY HOPING THAT HUSAK WILL INSTITUTE SOME LIBERALIZATION MEASURES. CHANGES IN THE PRESIDUM, AND ANY PERSONNEL OR STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN HIGHER PARTY AND GOVERNMENT CIRCLES, WILL BE OUR BEST INDICATORS OF HUSKA'S PLANS AND OF HIS SOLIDITY. IN FOREIGN POLICY, HIS ACCESSION TO THE PRESIDENCY WILL NOT CHANGE CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S TOTAL DEPENDENCY ON THE USSR, ALTHOUGH AS PRESIDENT, HUSAK MAY HAVE GREATER OPPORTUNITY TO MEET WITH FOREIGN LEADERS AND TRY HARDER TO OVERCOME THE STIGMA OF 1968. END SUMMARY.

1. HUSAK'S ACCESSION TO THE PRESIDENCY WHILE RETAINING HIS POST AS PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY MUST BE TAKEN TO MEAN THAT HE IS STILL THE CENTRAL FIGURE AND STRONGEST MAN IN THE POST-1968 REGIME IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA. AT AGE 62, APPARENTLY IN GOOD HEALTH, HE MUST BE CONSIDERED TO HOLD A VERY STRONG POSITION. INDEED, IF ONE UNDERWENT THE SUPREME TEST OF DIPLOMATIC JUDGEMENT AND PLACED COLD CASH ON HUSAK'S FUTURE, THE PRUDENT MAN WOULD PROBABLY BET THAT HUSAK WOULD BE NUMBER ONE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, INCLUDING BEYOND THE NEXT PARTY CONGRESS.

2. NEVERTHELESS THERE IS A GENERAL RELUCTANCE IN PRAGUE TO ACKNOWLEDGE HUSKA'S ASCENDANCY AS SOLID. WE KNOW NO ONE WHO EXPECTS HUSAK TO GO ABOUT CONSOLIDATING HIS ROLE NOW THE WAY, FOR EXAMPLE, CEAUSESCU HAS IN ROMANIA.
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MOST OBSERVERS HERE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT HUSAK WENT THROUGH A VERY TRYING TEST THE LAST FEW MONTHS, THAT HE EMERGED VICTORIOUS, BUT THAT HE IS STILL ON TRIAL AND FAR FROM FEELING SECURE IN HIS NUMBER-ONE-ITY. THEY DO NOT BELIEVE HUSAK HAS HEALED THE WOUNDS OF 1968 THE WAY KADAR HEALED WOUNDS IN HUNGARY, AND THEY BELIEVE THE RUSSIANS-HOWEVER MUCH THEY WANT STABILITY-DO NOT WANT HUSAK TO CONSOLIDATE HIS POSITION BEYOND THE

POINT WHERE THE RUSSIANS CAN STILL DIVIDE AND CONQUER. OF COURSE THESE "OBSERVERS" KNOW VERY FEW FACTS IN PRAGUE--PERHAPS LESS THAN IN ANY OTHER EAST EUROPEAN CAPITAL-- SO THE FEELING OF HUSAK'S INSECURITY MAY RESULT FROM TOO MUCH RUMOR-SWAPPING. BUT THAT IS THE FEELING.

3. WE CONTINUE TO DOUBT THAT A "DEAL" WAS MADE WHERE-BY HUSAK WOULD LOSE THE PARTY LEADERSHIP (OR ACCEPT AN HONORARY TITLE WHILE CEDING THE REAL LEADERSHIP TO SOMEONE ELSE, WHICH WOULD AMOUNT TO THE SAME THING) AT THE NEXT PARTY CONGRESS, ALTHOUGH THIS BELIEF IS WIDESPREAD AMONG DIPLOMATS IN PRAGUE. WE DO BELIEVE HUSAK HAS HEIGHTENED HIS VULNERABILITY BY TAKING BOTH JOBS, AND WE CONSIDER THAT ESPECIALLY OVER THE NEXT YEAR HE WILLBE PECULIARLY ON TRIAL. SEVERAL INDICATORS COME TO MIND: (A) WHAT HAPPENS IN THE SOVIET POLITBURO BETWEEN NOW AND THE CPSU CONGRESS IN FEBRUARY. (B) HOW HUSAK HANDLES THE PERENNIAL PROBLEM OF THE ALIENATED MEN OF 1968, AND IN PARTICULAR DUBCEK HIMSELF. WE FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THE EMIGRES AND THE FEW HARD-LINE OPPOSITIONISTS INSIDE THE COUNTRY WILL KEEP TOTAL SILENCE. BUT IF 1968 REMAINS AN OPEN SORE, THIS WILLSURELY WORK TO HUSAK'S DISADVANTAGE. (C) WILL HUSAK HOLDING BOTH JOBS BE ABLE AND WILLING TO FACE UP TO THE COUNTRY'S PRESSING PROBLEMS, INCLUDING THE ECONOMY IN THE NEW FIVE-YEAR PLAN? AND IN PARTICULAR, HOW WILL CZECH-SLOVAK TENSIONS BE HANDLED WITH A SLOVAK AS PRESIDENT.

4. WE WILL BE WATCHING CLOSELY NOW FOR EARLY SIGNS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE. FOR EXAMPLE, TRADITIONALLY THERE IS AN AMNESTY WHEN A NEW PRESIDENT ASSUMES OFFICE, AND WHILE THERE WAS A LIMITED AMNESTY FOR THE CONFIDENTIAL

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MAY 9 ANNIVERSARY, CZECHOSLOVAKS ARE EXPECTING ANOTHER ONE. IF IT AND OTHER HUSAK DEEDS POINT TOWARDS SOME LIBERALIZATION MEASURES, THIS WILL BE OF IMPORATNCE. THE MAIN AREA TO WATCH, HOWEVER, WILL BE PERSONNEL AND STRUCTURE. IT WOULD SEEM LOGICAL TO REPLACE SVOBODA ON THE ELEVEN-MAN PRESIDUM, FOR EXAMPLE, BUT EVERYONE WONDERS WHO A "LOYAL HUSAK MAN" WOULD BE. (RUDE PRAVO MAY 31 FRONTPAGE PHOTO OF HUSAK DECORATING SVOBODA, AND LATTER WAS IDENTIFIED AS PRESIDUM MEMBER.) OTHER CHANGES OF PERSONNEL MAY BE INDICATORS OF POSSIBLE POLICY CHANGES AS WELL; BUT MOST PEOPLE ARE BETTING ON BUSINESS AS USUAL.

5. IN PARENTHESES, IT MIGHT BE NOTED THAT ONE UNANSWERED QUESTION IS WHY THE CONSTITUTION HAD TO BE CHANGED.

PEOPLE WONDER WHY SVOBODA COULD NOT SIMPLY HAVE RESIGNED, RATHER THAN BEING REPLACED UNDER THE NEW CONSTITUTION PROVISION AFTER A YEAR'S INCAPACITY. DID HE REFUSE TO STEP DOWN, OR WERE THE LEADERS PREOCCUPIED WITH SURFACE LEAGALITY, OR WHAT? THE CONSTITUTIONAL JIGGLING, LIKE THE TIMING OF SVOBODA'S REPLACEMENT, REMAINS SOMEWHAT MYSTERIOUS.

6. AS REGARDS FOREIGN POLICY, WE DO NOT EXPECT ANY IMPORTANT CHANGE ATTENDANT UPON HUSAK'S PRESIDENCY, CERTAINLY NOTHING THAT WOULD AFFECT US INTEREST. CZECHOSLOVAKIA WILL REMAIN FULLY SUBSERVIENT TO MOSCOW. IN ONE REALM, CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S ATTEMPT TO OVERCOME THE STIGMA RESULTING FROM THE EVENTS OF 1968. HUSAK AS PRESIDENT MAY HAVE MORE OPPORTUNITY FOR ACCOMPLISHMENT BECAUSE OF GREATER CHANCES TO MEET WITH FOREIGN LEADERS. (AS GENERAL SECRETARY SINCE 1969, HE HAS TO OUR KNOWLEDGE MADE OFFICIAL VISITS OUTSIDE SOCIALIST WORLD ONLY TO INDIA AND FINLAND.) THE SPEECH AND PRESS WRITEUPS ABOUT HIS BECOMING PRESIDENT STRESSED THE NEED IN THE CURRENT ERA FOR CHIEFS OF STATE TO HAVE PERSONAL PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. HUSAK IN THE PAST HAS NOT GOT VERY FAR IN THIS DIRECTION; WE EXPECT HIM TO TRY HARDER NOW. AS FAR AS US-CZECHOSLOVAK BILATERAL RELATIONS ARE CONCERNED, WE DO NOT FORESEE ANY CHANGE
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RESULTING FROM HUSAK'S BECOMING PRESIDENT.
PERRY

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